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ER SONNETS

EMILY SHAW FORMAN

ILLUSTRATED

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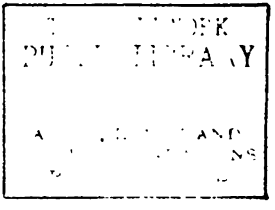
WILD-FLOWER SONNETS



WILD-FLOWER SONNETS

BY

EMILY SHAW FORMAN

With Illustrations

By ABBOTT GRAVES

Here 's flowers for thee.
Perdita

BOSTON
JOSEPH KNIGHT COMPANY
1895

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BROOM-CROWBERRY.

(COREMA.)

THE winds have breathed it to the waiting pines,
The pines have whispered it to dale and moor,
The sea has sung it to the listening shore:
No tiny twig, no rootlet but divines
The coming of the Spring. In air, in earth
What wonders now are wrought! Had we the ear
What rapturous rehearsal might we hear
Of Nature's symphony of growth and birth!
But soon the joy, no more to be suppressed,
Will burst in bloom, a floral melody,
Set to the music of the April rain;
And thou, Corema, Springtime's welcome guest,
First note of color in the harmony,
Wilt fleck with crimson all the cold, gray plain.

MARCH.

MAY 1

HEPATICA.

BRAVE, blue-eyed herald of the tardy Spring,
Who, while thy laggard followers still sleep,
Courageously thy steadfast watch dost keep,
Glad tidings of her first approach to bring, —
I wonder thy sweet patience never fails,
Though wintry snows lie deep on field and hill,
And from the sea the bitter blast blows chill,
That no weak doubt thy trusting heart assails.
I marvel at thy subtile chemistry,
Which can from the cold earth such faith distil,
And from gray skies such azure as doth fill
Thy gentle, upturned eyes. Oh, lesson me,
Fair sage! Courage and hope I 'd learn of thee,
And faith that fails not in adversity.

MARCH.

BLOOD-ROOT.

(SANGUINARIA.)

WHEN mid the budding elms the bluebird flits,
As if a bit of sky had taken wings;
When cheerily the first brave robin sings,
While timid April smiles and weeps by fits, —
Then dainty Blood-Root dons her pale-green wrap,
And ventures forth in some warm, sheltered nook,
To sit and listen to the gurgling brook,
And rouse herself from her long winter nap.
Give her a little while to muse and dream,
And she will throw her leafy cloak aside,
And stand in shining raiment, like a bride
Waiting her lord; whiter than snow will seem
Her spotless robe, the moss-grown rocks beside,
And bright as morn her golden crown will gleam.

APRIL.

HUDSONIA.

NOT in the cloistered safety of the woods,
Where the fair firstlings of the Springtime hide,
Not the gay, laughing, dancing brook beside,
Nor in the hush of mountain solitudes,
Seek we for thee, O hardy pioneer!
Upon the barren, bleak, and wind-swept sand
Of sea-girt isles thy feet are set. There, fanned
By breezes salt with spray, thou dost not fear
To spread thy couch of velvet tapestry,
With golden flowers soon to be 'broidered o'er.
A new Canute, thou sittest on the shore,
Sending brave challenge to the mighty sea;
While, far and near, as waiting thy command,
The glistening ranks of sturdy beach-grass stand.

APRIL.

BEACH-PLUM.

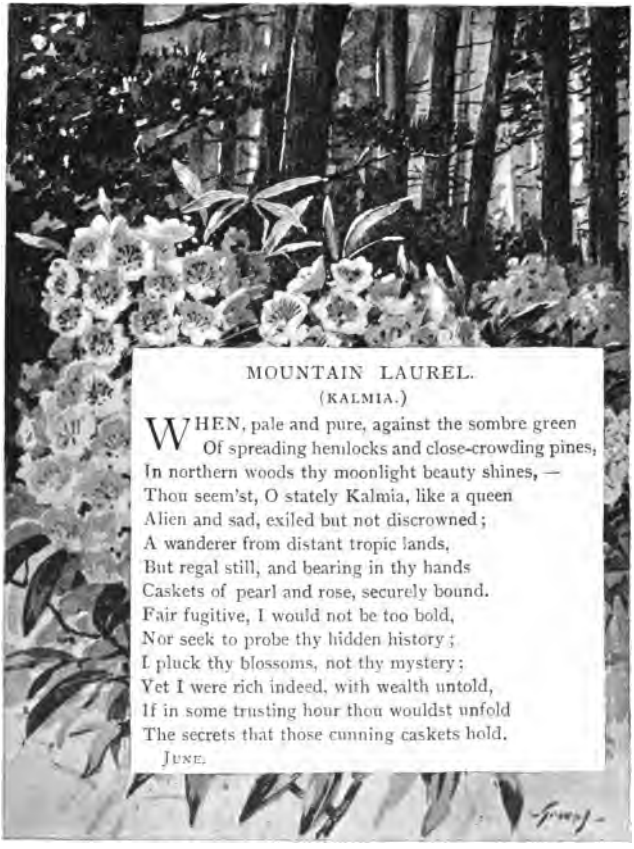
LIKE childhood's smile, half trusting, half afraid,
A thought of Spring steals o'er the landscape's face;
Told in the slender wind-flower's lissome grace,
Breathed from the Ar'butus, that loves the shade,
Writ in the deep'ning blue of sea and sky,
And look where, whipt by winds from east and north,
The sturdy Beach-Plum puts her blossoms forth. —
A wonder of white beauty to the eye,
A sphinx half buried in the shifting sand.
I would thy pretty riddle I could guess,
Of prudent thrift that looks like lavishness,
Of Autumn fruitage in chill Springtime planned;
Or learn by what rare craft, what hidden hands,
Thou hoardest ruby wine from these salt sands.

DOG'S-TOOTH VIOLET.

(ERYTHRONIUM.)

OF all the glad surprises of the Spring,—
Each year renewed, yet each year new again,—
None sends a quicker thrill through every vein,
None speeds the fancy on a swifter wing,
Than the first vision of thy loveliness,
O lily of the mead, stray child of June!
Dear runaway, thy sisters will come soon;
Meanwhile I take thee to my heart. Confess
Thy pranks. Why didst thou steal the Violet's name?
Why stain thy pale-green robe? Didst thou surmise
Feigned name or motley cloak could e'er disguise
Thy beauty? Lily art thou just the same.
Yet little heart have I thy masque to blame:
I love thee; thou art here: let that suffice.

MAY.



MOUNTAIN LAUREL.

(KALMIA.)

WHEN, pale and pure, against the sombre green
Of spreading hemlocks and close-crowding pines,
In northern woods thy moonlight beauty shines, —
Thou seem'st, O stately Kalmia, like a queen
Alien and sad, exiled but not discrowned;
A wanderer from distant tropic lands,
But regal still, and bearing in thy hands
Caskets of pearl and rose, securely bound.
Fair fugitive, I would not be too bold,
Nor seek to probe thy hidden history;
I pluck thy blossoms, not thy mystery;
Yet I were rich indeed, with wealth untold,
If in some trusting hour thou wouldst unfold
The secrets that those cunning caskets hold.

JUNE.

SCARLET PIMPERNEL.

(ANAGALLIS.)

BRIGHT little wayfarer, in scarlet cap
With purple tuft atop, and doublet green, —
Flora's pet page sometime thou mayst have been,
Fallen from favor by some strange mishap; —
It touches me to note the calm content
With which thou dost accept thy lowly lot,
And makest gay some poor neglected spot
With thy glad presence; pitching thy small tent
Upon the farmer's homely garden-patch,
Or close beside the dusty roadside way;
Heedless of high or low, if but a ray
Of heaven's golden sunshine thou canst catch; —
Watching and waiting, living not in vain,
O tiny prophet of the coming rain!

JUNE.

PRICKLY PEAR.

(CACTUS.)

I KNOW an isle, clasped in the sea's strong arms,
Sport of his rage, and sharer of his dreams;
A barren spot to alien eyes it seems,
But for its own it wears unfading charms.
From Spring's first kiss to Autumn's last caress
Gayly its moorlands bloom, from strand to strand;
And many a favored nook, by west winds fanned,
Holds flowers unmatched for tint and loveliness.
But most I mind me of a lonesome shore,
To countless gulls a harbor and freehold,
Where, — like some shipwrecked buccaneer of old,
Cast on the sands, condemned to roam no more, —
In spiny armature, secure and bold,
The Cactus lies at length and guards its gold.

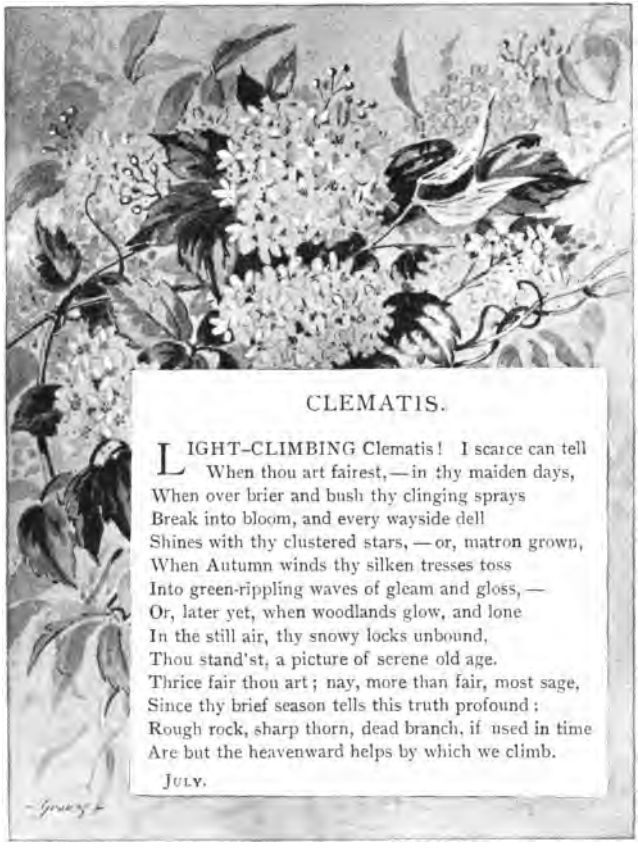
JULY.

TWIN-FLOWER.

(LINNÆA.)

LINNÆA, of fairy mould and breath divine,
Dear foster-child of him who gave his name
With dower of love to thee; his fading fame
Thou dost revive at many a wayside shrine,
Where from thy lowly altars incense fine
Floats on the air; so sweet it well might shame
Jasmine or pink, whose odors are but tame,
Matched with that fragrance pure and wild of thine.
Well may the wanderer pause to breathe a prayer
Above that marvel of thy light-poised bells
So sweetly twinned. How clear, to him who heeds,
God's universal thought is written there:
The twofold life that in all Nature dwells,
The primal law, that each the other needs!

JULY.



CLEMATIS.

LIGHT-CLIMBING Clematis! I scarce can tell
When thou art fairest, — in thy maiden days,
When over brier and bush thy clinging sprays
Break into bloom, and every wayside dell
Shines with thy clustered stars, — or, matron grown,
When Autumn winds thy silken tresses toss
Into green-rippling waves of gleam and gloss, —
Or, later yet, when woodlands glow, and lone
In the still air, thy snowy locks unbound,
Thou stand'st, a picture of serene old age.
Thrice fair thou art; nay, more than fair, most sage,
Since thy brief season tells this truth profound:
Rough rock, sharp thorn, dead branch, if used in time
Are but the heavenward helps by which we climb.

JULY.

CARDINAL FLOWER.

NO purer joy the glad midsummer holds, —
For those who love to seek, in secret nooks
Of wood or mead, or by the marge of brooks,
The hidden treasures she for love unfolds, —
Than, on a morn when skies are perfect blue,
And clouds are far and fleecy, loitering slow,
To follow some wild streamlet's wayward flow,
And spy afar, O flower of matchless hue,
Thy wondrous brightness flashing through the green;
As if a flock of redbirds stooped to drink,
In airy flutter, at the brooklet's brink;
Or, as a troop of Indian girls, half seen,
Half hid, were wading in the crystal stream,
While through the leaves their scarlet 'broideries gleam.

AUGUST.

WHITE FRINGED ORCHIS.

ONE golden day I wandered far and wide,
Down sheltered dells, spicy with rose and bay,
Through marshy meads, with scarlet lilies gay,
And sought and searched for thee, O fairest bride
Of summer fields, Fringed Orchis, snowy pure!
Bright Arethusa smiled to see me pass,
And many a modest wilding from the grass
Glanced shyly upward; nothing could allure
My heart from its fond quest: the yearning grew
At every step to find thy hiding-place,
As grows the longing to behold the face
Of one long loved, long absent. Well I knew
Such love as mine must win. Some subtle power
Led me to thee: was it thy soul, my flower?

AUGUST.

SABBATIA.

UPON the margin of a reedy pond,
Held in the hollow of low, rounded hills,
Where Silence, like a presence, broods and thrills,
I found Sabbatia. As a lover fond,
Flying, the mistress of his heart to greet,
Forgets the world in reading her sweet eyes,
And cries: "For me God makes a paradise!"
So, kneeling, happy, at Sabbatia's feet,
Bathed in the sunshine of her rosy smile,
I murmured: "'T was for me she grew so fair."
For answer, lightly glided here and there
A blue-winged dragon-fly; a bird the while
Trilled one clear note; tall rushes stirred, and near
I caught the glisten of the sun-dew's tear.

AUGUST.

PURPLE GERARDIA.

IN that fair, dreamy border-land, that lies
Between the glowing zone of summer flowers, —
Frail, fleet recorders of the summer hours, —
And Autumn's belt of gold and purple dyes,
O my Gerardia, thou reignest queen.
Tribute from both thou gatherest, I think;
Since thy right royal robe of purple pink
Holds tints of June in its rich, rosy sheen,
Deepened with touch of Autumn hues to come.
So, too, a pleasing sadness marks thy reign,
A summer joy, dashed with presage of pain;
For when o'er dale and down flushes thy bloom,
We sadly smile, to think thy pretty bells
Must toll the dying Summer's passing knells.

SEPTEMBER.

GOLDEN-ROD.

A PATIENT, pensive silence fills the wood,
Broken by muffled droppings, sad as tears;
On the far hills a purple haze appears,
That veils and yet reveals their mournful mood;
Soft mists along the lowlands creep, and brood
On lake and river. Through the hush one hears
The tuneless drone of insects, lulling fears
And hopes alike. A sense half understood,
Of something sweet that was and is no more,
Stirs in the heart. "Summer is gone," we say.
But see, as dreamily she went her way,
She dropped the golden sceptre that she bore:
Ah, precious symbol of her gracious sway,
Bright incarnation of the smile she wore!

LADY'S TRESSES.

(SPIRANTHES.)

WHEN summer flowers have shut their sunny eyes,
And summer birds to southern lands have flown;
When crickets chant their drowsy monotone,
And sadly through the pines the south wind sighs;
When over hill and plain in lavish tides
The golden-rod its garnered sunshine sheds,
And asters, white and purple, nod their heads,
And seem to say, "Naught that is fair abides!"
Ah, then, in shady lane and grassy field,
What new delight thy slender spires to find,
With tress of hyacinthine bells entwined!
Fragrance like thine no rose of June can yield:
No lily can eclipse thy snow, dear prize,
Flung backward from sweet Summer as she flies.

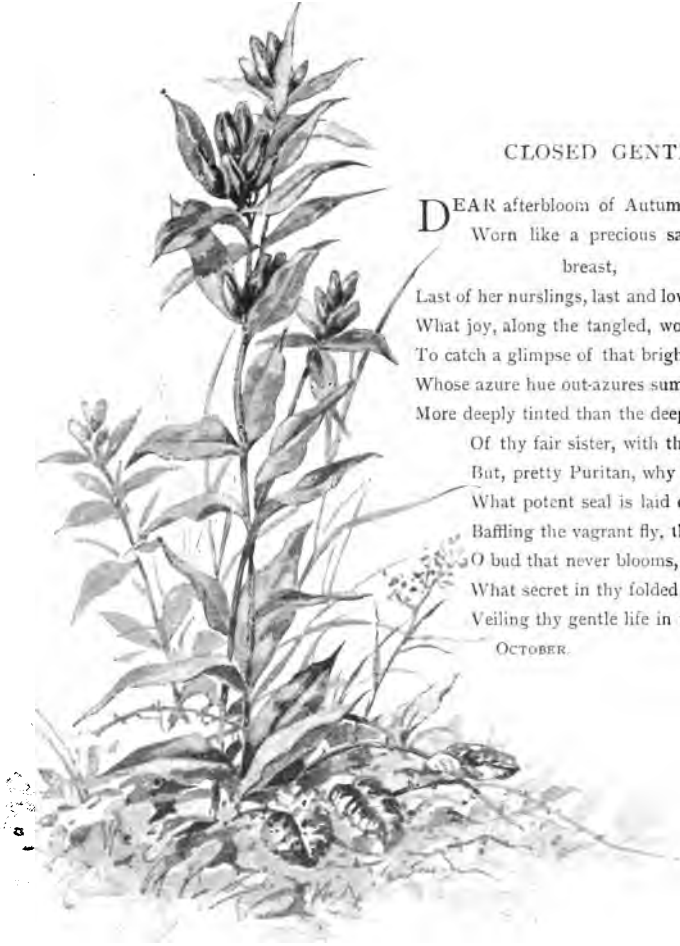
SEPTEMBER.

GRASS OF PARNASSUS.

(PARNASSIA.)

O STATELY, calm, and pure, as best beseems
One born in that far land of sun and song,
Beloved of gods and men, whose vales along
Strayed once the sacred Nine, and by whose streams
The great Pan piped, — remote and strange it seems
To find thee here, mid grasses rank and long,
Where, by the hidden brook, serene and strong
As Autumn's smile, our clear-eyed Gentian gleams.
Perchance it was her blue and fringéd eyes
That lured thee from thy storied home to range,
And tempted thee to give, in glad exchange
For such a heaven, thy classic Grecian skies:
It well may be, since beauty knows no clime,
And love, immortal, conquers space and time.

OCTOBER.



CLOSED GENTIAN.

DEAR afterbloom of Autumn's riper days,
Worn like a precious sapphire on her breast,
Last of her nurslings, last and loved the best; —
What joy, along the tangled, woodside ways,
To catch a glimpse of that bright robe of thine,
Whose azure hue out-azures summer skies,
More deeply tinted than the deep fringed eyes
Of thy fair sister, with their glance divine.
But, pretty Puritan, why so demure?
What potent seal is laid on lip and lid,
Baffling the vagrant fly, the wooing bee?
O bud that never blooms, recluse and pure,
What secret in thy folded heart is hid,
Veiling thy gentle life in mystery?

OCTOBER.

12032B

COMMON EVERLASTING.

(ANTENNARIA.)

COMMON? — So is the all-embracing air,
The joy of flowing waters, and the light,
God's smile unquenchable. Why should we slight
These common gifts, and prize alone the rare?
Common yet everlasting, like God's care.
New England's edelweiss, dear to my sight
Are thy pure, tufted roselets, pearly white,
Lighting our wooded ways. Thou well mayst share,
Sweet herb of grace, thy Alpine sister's name; —
Type of right noble traits, that still survive
In scattered homesteads and on lonely farms;
An honest poverty that knows no shame,
Brave to endure and resolute to strive,
And childlike faith that all weak fear disarms.

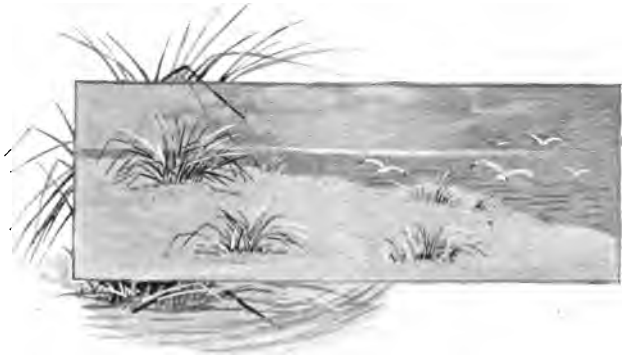
OCTOBER.

WITCH-HAZEL.

(HAMAMELIS.)

WHAT time the dainty darlings of the Spring,
Summer's ripe beauties, Autumn's brilliant train,
In swift procession trooped o'er hill and plain,
Through vale and grove, while every bird did sing
His fitting song, — we took no note of thee,
O arch-enchantress of stream-haunted woods,
Waving aloft thy flowerless magic rods,
And whisp'ring to the winds their mystery.
But when the merry carnival is o'er,
The banners furled, the gay robes laid away,
Thou shinest forth in marvellous array,
Charming our thoughts from all that passed before.
Is it to witch old Winter with thy wiles,
This burst of golden hair and sun-bright smiles?

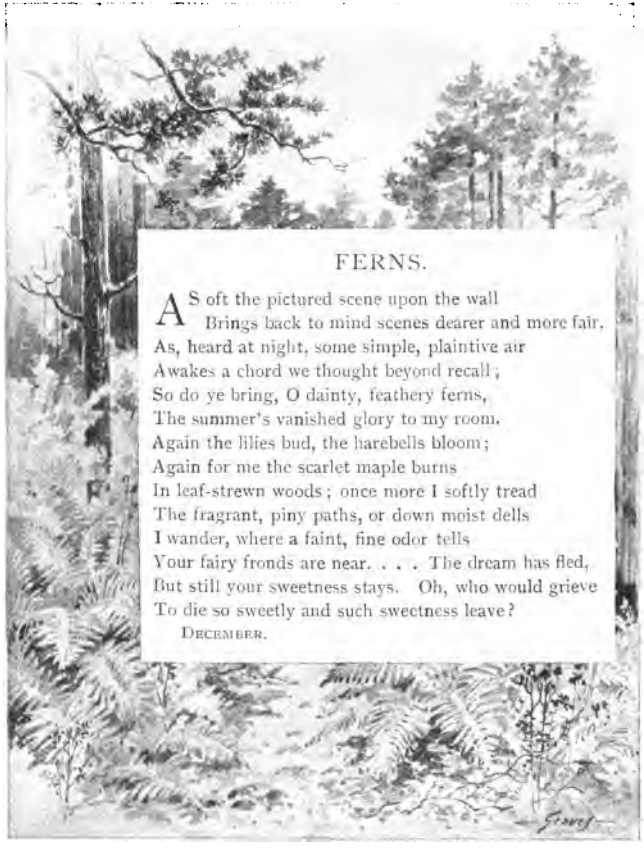
NOVEMBER.



BEACH-GRASS.

A LEADEN sky above a leaden sea,
A sandy beach, with wreck of sea-weed strewn,
No sound but Ocean's cheerless monotone,
And not a flower to bear me company!
So moaned my heart one dull November day.
Lifting my downcast eyes, I grew aware
Of a near, helpful presence: everywhere,
Down to the sea's white verge, in staunch array,
Rank upon rank, the steadfast beach-grass stood;
Strength and content in all its sweeping curves,
Type of a soul that bows but never swerves.
Nobly didst thou rebuke my plaintive mood,
O faithful watcher of the cliffs and dunes,
Writing upon the sands thy mystic runes.

NOVEMBER.



FERNS.

AS oft the pictured scene upon the wall
Brings back to mind scenes dearer and more fair,
As, heard at night, some simple, plaintive air
Awakes a chord we thought beyond recall;
So do ye bring, O dainty, feathery ferns,
The summer's vanished glory to my room.
Again the lilies bud, the harebells bloom;
Again for me the scarlet maple burns
In leaf-strewn woods; once more I softly tread
The fragrant, piny paths, or down moist dells
I wander, where a faint, fine odor tells
Your fairy fronds are near. . . . The dream has fled,
But still your sweetness stays. Oh, who would grieve
To die so sweetly and such sweetness leave?

DECEMBER.

ASLEEP.

NO more the Violets lift their dewy eyes,
No more the Columbine, alert and gay,
Tosses her graceful head in airy play,
No more the Mayflower plans her sweet surprise.
No "hide-and-seek" with shy Linnæa now,
No "hunt-the-Lady's Slipper," in the wood,
No glad "I spy," in merry Autumn mood,
With blue-eyed Gentian. Low their heads they bow,
Tired with the frolic of their gladsome day;
Cradled upon their nurse's ample breast,
The brown old Earth, who hushes them to rest
With tales of gnome and dryad, nymph and fay;
While Mother Nature comes, in love, to throw
O'er all the soft, white comfort of the snow.

JANUARY.

TOKENS.

AS tired children, when the night comes on,
Touched by the magic wand of sleep, let fall
Their baby treasures, — trifles that recall
The pretty story of the day that 's gone, —
So last year's flowers, asleep beneath the snow,
Dear tokens of their little day have left,
Twice dear since of themselves we are bereft.
Mitchella's coral beads lie all aglow
On the cold ground; the sweet-brier's scarlet urn
Holds precious memories of bud and bloom,
Embalmed with hope of roses yet to come;
By the bound brook the alder-berries burn
Athwart the gloom; and in the barren fields
Faint fragrance still life-everlasting yields.

FEBRUARY.

Lucker 9-22-20.